**VERMIN ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1962**

**House of Assembly, 18 October 1962, pages 1567-8**

Second reading

**The Hon. D. N. BROOKMAN (Minister of Agriculture)** obtained leave and introduced a Bill for an Act to amend the Vermin Act, 1931-1960. Read a first time.

The Hon. D. N. BROOKMAN: I move:

That this Bill be now read a second time.

It is designed, first, to prevent the breeding of rabbits commercially and, secondly, to confer on a vermin board power to dispose of, abandon or remove any fence vested in it if it is no longer necessary for the control of vermin. Section 19 of the Vermin Act, 1931-1960, casts a duty on owners and occupiers of land to destroy all vermin on that land, but section 36 relieves the owner or occupier of the duty, inter alia, of destroying rabbits kept in rabbit-proof cages or in rabbit-proof enclosures not exceeding 600 square feet in area.

Because the breeding of rabbits on a large scale would be inconsistent with the policy of extermination underlying the Vermin Act, it has been the policy of the department to discourage the commercial breeding of rabbits in this State, but commercial breeding cannot be effectively prevented so long as the Act enables rabbits to be kept on any land in enclosures of 600 square feet and does not limit the number of such enclosures. Besides, the establishment of commercial breeding centres in this State will render the task of extermination more difficult and hamper the efforts being made to bring the rabbit menace under control. Of late, the department has received inquiries from both local and interstate sources which suggest that the prospects of setting up rabbit breeding centres in this State are being examined by commercial interests.

The Government considers that the setting up of such breeding centres would be effectively prevented if persons were divested of the power and duty to destroy rabbits kept in any cage on any land by the owner or occupier thereof only so long as the cage was rabbit-proof and did not exceed 36 square feet in area and no more than one such cage was on that land. Clause 3 of the Bill accordingly re-enacts section 36 of the principal Act so as to produce that effect.

While the principal Act contains provisions for the disposal of fences vested in a board only after the board is abolished or its powers and functions are suspended under the Act, no provision exists for a board itself to dispose of or abandon a fence that it considers no longer necessary for the control of vermin. Clause 4 of the Bill is designed to supply that omission. The clause provides that, where the Minister concurs with a board that a fence is no longer necessary for the control of vermin and publishes a notice to that effect in the Gazette, the board may dispose of the fence subject to such terms and conditions as the Minister may prescribe.

I want to go back, briefly, to the commercial keeping of rabbits and read a report prepared by the officer in charge of the Vermin Branch of the Lands Department:

It is an anomaly that on the one hand the Government is encouraging district councils to vigorously enforce rabbit destruction by landholders, and yet the Act at present permits the keeping of rabbits for commercial purposes.

This is a matter of concern to councils, as has been mentioned to the advisory officer. Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia have all recently passed legislation heavily curtailing or prohibiting the commercial keeping of rabbits, and it is known that representations have been made urging similar action in New South Wales.

Considerable success in rabbit control has been achieved in New Zealand without benefit if myxomatosis. Part of that success is attributed to decommercialization of the rabbit, which includes total prohibition of keeping of rabbits for any purpose.

I point out that this is not a decommercialization of rabbits but a prohibition of the keeping of rabbits for commercial purposes. The report continues:

The domestic rabbit is of precisely the same species as the wild rabbit. Myxomatosishas been of considerable assistance in reducing wild rabbit populations. Shope’s fibroma (which is a live virus) is used to give rabbits immunity against myxomatosis. There is nothing to prevent stud rabbits already inoculated with Shope’s fibroma from being inteoduced into South Australia from New South Wales. It is a definite possibility that this virus could be transmitted from commercially kept ravbbits to wild rabbits. Always there is a danger that rabbits kept in enclosures may escape and breed in the wild, a factor not to be overlooked in endeavouring to achieve a high level of control. A considerable amount of hardship can be caused to individuals if Iegislation such as this is left until an industry has become firmly established. This has occurred in at least one State,

On the general question of rabbit control and eradication, some time ago the Lands Department augmented its staff by the addition of a Vermin Advisory Officer who is highly qualified, particularly in rabbit destruction work. He has been making a survey of the rabbit problem within the State. That survey is not yet complete but it will make an assessment of the general problem and the measures most needed to control rabbits.

Whilst “eradication” is a word I should like to be able to use, it would be too ambitious to say “to eradicate rabbits”. However, I will say at least “to control them” at this stage. It would undoubtedly imply eventual eradication in many areas of the State. This officer is well aware of all the most up-to-date methods of rabbit control; he has studied the work going on in other States as well. When he has finished his survey, the position will be reviewed in order to organize a properly concerted attack by councils and landholders upon the rabbit pest. This matter is very much the concern of councils, and they will be contacted and given all possible assistance to encourage the destruction of rabbits within their areas.

Mr Casey secured the adjournment of the debate